



What we're doing in Rhode Island

U.S. EPA | STORMWATER OUTREACH AT EPA NEW ENGLAND



Credit: Betsy Dake

STORMWATER is a leading cause of poor water quality. Rain or melted snow runs down driveways, sidewalks and streets carrying oil, dirt and other pollutants into nearby waterways. Polluted runoff, which can cause erosion and flooding, runs into waterways and degrades plants, fish, shellfish and other wildlife. In water used for recreation, the runoff can lead to illness, and people who eat contaminated fish can also become sick. Untreated stormwater can also contaminate drinking water sources.

INTRO:

Rhode Island issues permits for discharging pollution into bodies of water. Modeled after the federal National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), the program requires permits for construction sites of an acre or more, industrial sites and some municipal sewer systems. Rhode Island's permits go beyond federal stormwater regulation to require methods of developing land that protect the environment. The state permits encourage growth that avoids wetlands, maintains open space, protects the edges of sensitive water bodies and minimizes paving over green areas. The state encourages building in urban areas and areas that can handle more runoff.

TO MANAGE STORMWATER IN RHODE ISLAND WE ARE:

Developing in ways that pollute less — The RI Department of Environmental Management requires low impact development practices, as mandated by a 2007 state law. These practices include various ways to filter, absorb and reduce stormwater runoff. The law calls for developers to control stormwater, not to contaminate the groundwater more than necessary and to avoid an increase in polluted discharges after storms.

Training local officials — The state sent municipal officials to the University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center to learn about successful stormwater management techniques, known as "best management practices."

Exploring stormwater utilities — Representatives of 17 towns and cities in the state went to a one-day forum hosted by DEM on creating local stormwater utilities to help pay for managing runoff pollution.

Reducing paved surfaces — The town of Bristol is renovating the town beach parking lot to capture untreated runoff that flows from the pavement to the beach. This pollution has led to closing the beach in summer because of water quality violations.

Promoting Green Roof Technology — An urban industrial building in South Providence was restored as a business incubator site, incorporating a green roof and rainwater recovery system. A green roof was also one of the many sustainable features included in the restoration of a formerly contaminated site on the waterfront in Providence that was developed as the new headquarters for Save the Bay, an environmental organization. The state has funded several green roof projects and provided support for other site design features that reduce stormwater pollution, including porous pavement and rain garden landscaping.

Enforcing against violators — A concrete plant in East Providence was discharging unpermitted industrial process water and stormwater, both separately and comingled. In addition to paying a \$55,000 penalty to EPA, the company spent \$170,000 to comply with permit requirements and agreed to spend \$178,000 for projects, including one that will allow the company to recycle water and cement sediment year-round.

All of the projects listed above received EPA funding or support.

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